



File Code: 1950

Date: May 22, 2013

Dear Interested Public:

The Sisters Ranger District of the Deschutes National Forest would like to know your concerns, questions, and suggestions in regards to changing the trail maintenance objectives (TMO) of two trails and the decommissioning of two trails within the Mt. Jefferson Wilderness and the decommissioning of one trail in Mt. Washington Wilderness.

Wilderness trails proposed for a change in TMOs from their current classification of TMO 3 to TMO 1 include the portion of the Jefferson Lake trail (#4006) northwest of the prominent lava flow to Patsy Lake and the entire Brush Creek trail (#4004). The combined distance of the Jefferson Lake and Brush Creek trails is approximately 12 miles. This reclassification will in effect have the following changes in maintenance: 1) less frequent maintenance schedule; 2), obstacles may be present; 3), constructed features such as bridges and culverts should not be present.

The Minto Lake trail (#4006) and Sugar Pine Ridge trail (#4002) within Mt. Jefferson Wilderness and the Dry Creek trail (#4050) within the Mt. Washington Wilderness are proposed for decommissioning which total about 15 miles of trail. Closure and decommissioning of these trails would result in: (1) the removal of signs associated with the trails; (2) drainage work along trail segments to prevent heavy erosion; (3) removal of any structures, such as bridges, that are associated with the trails; and (4) restoration work to encourage rehabilitation of the trails.

The project is located about 12 miles west and northwest of Sisters, Oregon. Specifically, the locations for each trail are:

- Minto Lake trail: Township 12 S. Range 8 E. Sections 22, 16, 21, and 20
- Brush Creek trail: Township 12 S. Range 8 E. Sections 2, 3, 4, and 5
- Sugar Pine Ridge trail: Township 11 S. Range 9 E. Sections 29, 30, 25 and Township 11 S. Range 8 E. Sections 25, 23, 22, and 21
- Dry Creek trail is located at Township 14 S. Range 8 E. Sections 21, 28, 29, 20, 17, and 8.

The management area allocations in the Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (FLRMP) as amended are: Wilderness, Management Area 6; Metolius Special Forest, Management Area 22; Metolius Scenic Views, Management Area 26; and Late Successional Reserve.



Existing Condition

Eight Forest Service system trails provide access to the east side of the Mount Jefferson Wilderness Area. Most of the system trails provide East/West access to the Cascade Crest and an entire complement of system trails on the Willamette National Forest's portion of the Wilderness Area. There are several instances where trails beginning on Deschutes National Forest duplicate access to similar geographic destinations.

Cascade Crest Wilderness areas such as Mt. Jefferson Wilderness have experienced high levels of recreation use. A unique challenge in high use Wilderness environments is maintaining the Wilderness Character and a range of experiences as prescribed by the Wilderness Resource Spectrum (WRS). The Deschutes National Forest Wilderness and Cascade Recreation Area Plans (WCRA) used the concept of Persons At One Time (PAOT) as a way to quantify recreation use capacity. The specific number should be qualified with other measures such as campsite impacts to have a more accurate estimate of Wilderness use.

Mt. Jefferson Wilderness

The Mt. Jefferson Wilderness remains below the forecasted PAOT threshold of 116-176. In 2011 approximately 8203 visitors entered the wilderness using a Deschutes National Forest trail head. This equates to approximately 91 PAOT per day. Permit data indicates that use is not constant throughout summer season and is typically concentrated towards weekends and in specific areas such as Canyon Creek Meadows, Wasco Lake and Carl Lake. While 2011 did not exceed the PAOT threshold, many areas, especially those categorized as WRS semi primitive, are experiencing declining social conditions and/or opportunities for solitude, resulting in high campsite density and campsite impacts that exceed Deschutes National Forest Land Management Plan standards and guidelines.

An additional challenge is the effects of wildfire on the wilderness trail system. After the 2003 B&B fire, the maintenance of the trails system became a significant management challenge. Many of the trails in this portion of the Wilderness area were burned with intense heat; many of these trails were quickly reclaimed by fire generated shrubs, such as ceanothus and manzanita. As a result significant post fire trail restoration efforts have been made using Forest Service crews and volunteer groups such as the High Cascade Volunteers. However, given the abundant seasonal growth of post-fire shrubs and tree fall the task of maintaining trail access has been very difficult and expensive. Since 2010, no significant trail maintenance activities have occurred on the trails under discussion. As a result, the trails have deteriorated in condition and have even resulted in several search and rescue events.

Mt Washington Wilderness

Mt. Washington Wilderness is most easily accessed from the west utilizing a complement of trails including the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail. Historically, the only trail maintained on Deschutes National Forest portion of Mt. Washington Wilderness has been the Dry Creek/Hortence trail (#4050). The Dry Creek/Hortence trail is characterized as a dense forested trail with no primary destination, loop options, or a connection to the greater trail system. Consequently, the trail receives very little visitor use. Permit data and field observations suggest

the Dry Creek trail is most heavily used during the hunting season. In addition to these challenges, the trail has not been maintained to standard since 2004, experiences heavy blow down of trees, and is very low on the trail maintenance priority list. Furthermore, the Shadow Lake fire of 2011 has had similar effects for maintaining the Dry Creek trail. After the Shadow Lake fire the Dry Creek trail was all but unrecognizable as 100% of all drainage features were consumed in the fire. Post-fire effects resulted in significant soil transport obliterating any recognizable component of the trail tread. The trail would be decommissioned under the proposed action.

Proposed Action

The following actions are proposed to meet the purpose and need for action:

Trail Information	Existing Structure or Condition	Action
Mt. Jefferson Wilderness Area Minto Lake trail (#4006) Length – 4.01 miles	Minto Lake trail is currently a TMO 3 trail. Minto Lake trail duplicates trail access provided by the Rockpile Lake trail and the Summit Lake trail. Minto Lake trail shares a trail head with the Rockpile Lake trail and also serves as the most northern portion of the Metolius Windigo trail. Minto Lake trail is poorly designed in several places and continues to be a maintenance challenge as the trail travels through wetlands and portions of the trail were burned. Minto Lake trail is not critical to any loop options or access points.	-Decommission
Mt. Jefferson Wilderness Area Brush Creek trail (#4004) Length – 4.1 miles	Brush Creek trail is currently a TMO 3. Brush Creek trail is another east/west access route. Similar access is provided by the Rockpile Lake trail and the Shirley Lake trail. Fire regenerated vegetation, light use and other natural features have made portions of this trail difficult to maintain and follow. The Brush Creek trail does have a small segment of unique trail that cannot be traveled safely by stock.	-Change TMO to a 1 (Minimally developed trail, less frequent maintenance schedule, obstacles may be present and constructed features should not be present).
Mt. Jefferson Wilderness Area Sugar Pine Ridge trail (#4002) Length – 6.9 miles	The Sugar Pine trail has mostly been reclaimed by early seral vegetation as a result of wildfire activity. This trail provided the southern portion of the Jefferson Lake/Sugarpine Ridge Loop option. The Sugarpine Ridge trail departs from Jefferson Lake trail head and then gains the summit of Sugarpine Ridge and eventually	-Decommission

	intersects with the Cabot Lake trail where it passes Junction Lake.	
Mt. Jefferson Wilderness Area Jefferson Lake Trail (#4001) Length - 9.1 miles	Jefferson Lake trail has historically been a lightly used trail with some notable features including Old Growth Douglas Fir, Lava Fields and is the most northern trail on Deschutes National Forest's portion of Mt. Jefferson Wilderness area. Jefferson Lake is the main access route to Jefferson Lake, Patsy Lake and Table Lake. It is possible to use Jefferson Lake to connect to Carl Lake, Shirley Lake and Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail.	Maintain Jefferson Lake trail at TMO 3 from the trail head to the prominent lava flow near the historic intersection of Jefferson Lake trail and Sugar Pine Ridge trail (.7 miles). After Jefferson Lake trail crosses the prominent lava flow, change the TMO to 1 (Minimally developed trail, less frequent maintenance schedule, obstacles may be present and constructed features should not be present). until the trail reaches Patsy Lake where the trail system providing access to Carl and Table Lakes would be maintained at its current TMO 3 (8.4 miles).
Mt. Washington Wilderness Area Dry Creek Trail (#4050) Length -4.8 miles	Permit data and field observations suggest the Dry Creek trail experiences very low use, and is mostly used during the hunting season. This trail has not been maintained to standard since 2004, experiences heavy blow down and is very low on the trail maintenance priority list.	Decommission

Type of Environmental Analysis

At this time it is anticipated that the project would be documented in an environmental assessment (EA). The EA would be available for 30-day public comment, followed by the issuance of a Decision Notice. The project would be subject to an objection period as outlined in 35 CFR 218. .

How to Participate and Submit Comments

You are invited to comment on this proposed action. Your comments will help identify issues to be considered in the environmental review. Please submit your comments by June 24th, 2013 so they can be considered in the analysis.

Please submit your comments to Jonathan Erickson, Wilderness Trails Decommission Project Manager, P.O. Box 249, Sisters OR. 97759. Telephone (541) 419-4609. FAX: (541) 549-7746. Hand delivered comments may be delivered to Highway 20 and Pine Street, Sisters OR. 97759 during business hours: 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. E-

mail comments should be sent to: comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-sisters@fs.fed.us.
Please put “Wilderness Trails” in the subject line of your email.

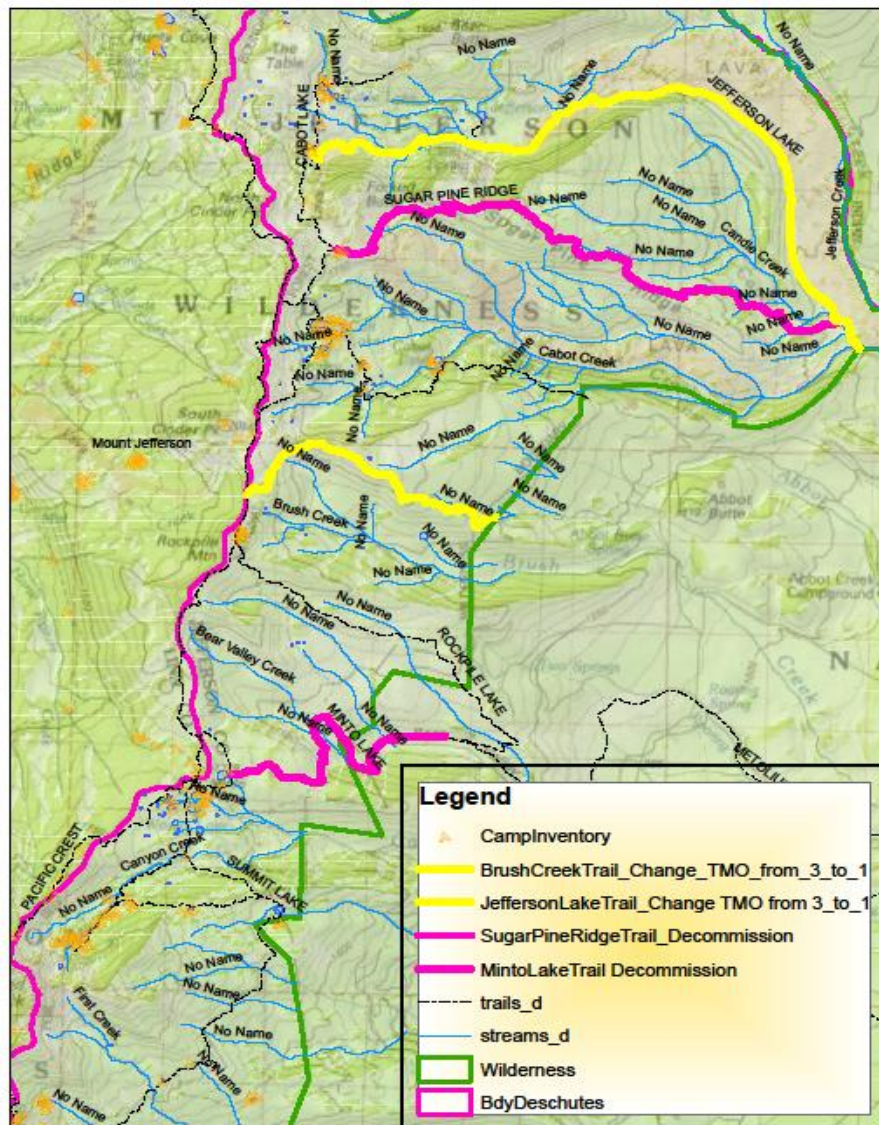
Thank you for your interest in wilderness and trail management on the Sisters Ranger District.

Sincerely,

s/s Kristie L. Miller

Kristie L. Miller
District Ranger

Mt. Jefferson Wilderness Trails Decommissioning and TMO Change Project



Mt. Washington Trail Decommission Project

